

Court 'serious' About Collecting Restitution

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If you owe restitution in a circuit court case, you probably already know local officials are getting serious about payments.

"The court expects its orders to be followed," said Circuit Judge Jonathan E. Lauderbach in a media release. "Victims deserve restitution when someone has committed a crime against them."

The program began about a month ago with help from the Michigan Supreme Court and the State Court Administrator's Office. The effort involved developing a software program that tracks the amount of restitution due and generates billing statements with warning letters.

More than \$10,000 has been collected since the program began. Trial Court Administrator Jerome M. P. Kole said the total amount of restitution owed through circuit court orders isn't known, since the numbers are kept by year and include some amounts that are counted twice or more due to cases where multiple people are convicted of the same crime.

The amounts owed in many cases are between \$700 and \$1,000, Kole said. In bigger cases, such as that of an arson fire at the Eastlawn Plaza, billing plans are put in place.

For those in state prison, a "sweep order" is filed, Kole said. That sweeps the excess money from prisoner accounts -- anything over \$50 -- to the circuit court to be applied to restitution. If the person doesn't respond to the bill, then a warning letter is mailed. If the warning letter is ignored, the person will be held in contempt of court, Kole said.

"We are serious about this," said Circuit Judge Michael J. Beale in a media release. "We will use our contempt power where appropriate to get compliance."